

VIETNAMESE AFFAIRS STAFF
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

DATE: 6 July 1971

TO: Rear Admiral Daniel Murphy

FROM:

SUBJECT: Requested Memorandum

REMARKS:

In response to your request of Friday, 2 July, my colleagues have prepared the attached memorandum on enemy capabilities and options in the northernmost portion of South Vietnam. I am relaying this advance copy via [redacted] in order to meet your Tuesday, 6 July deadline. If you have no objections, we plan to print this document as an intelligence memorandum. The printed copies should be out on 7 July and will have accompanying maps, which are not included in the attached advanced version because there was not sufficient time for the necessary physical reproduction.

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

cc. Gen. Bennett

- 1 - DOD Special Projects w/att
- 1 - [redacted]
- 1 - GAC Chrono w/att

Published w/DO

VIETNAMESE AFFAIRS STAFF
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

DATE: 6 July 1971

TO: Lt. General Donald V. Bennett

FROM:

SUBJECT:

REMARKS:

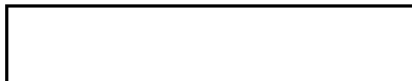
Attached is what I hope is a self explanatory note to Admiral Murphy together with a memorandum we have prepared to meet his request. I am sending this copy for your information via As indicated in the note to Admiral Murphy, this quick study will be printed as a CIA memorandum on Wednesday, 7 July.

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

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6 July 1971

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Military Situation in the DMZ Area

Introduction

Shortly after the completion of Lam Son 719 -- the allied operation into the Lao panhandle -- it became apparent that North Vietnam was going ahead with another summer campaign in South Vietnam's northernmost Quang Tri Province. In April and May several North Vietnamese main force combat units moved south across the DMZ to link up with enemy forces sent earlier to northwestern Quang Tri to harass allied forces pushing into Laos. These moves were accompanied by extensive repositioning and battle preparations by Communist infantry and artillery units in the eastern DMZ region. As the weather in Quang Tri improved in late May, a strong enemy thrust towards the coastal lowlands became a distinct possibility.

By early June, at least eight North Vietnamese infantry regiments and two artillery regiments, probably totaling some 15,000 men, were located in the northern and western parts of Quang Tri. Some of these units normally operate in the DMZ region during the dry summer months, but they were heavily reinforced this year -- as they had been in some earlier years -- by elements of the North Vietnamese 304th and 320th divisions.

The opening round of the enemy's summer campaign south of the DMZ occurred on 3 June when allied positions in northeastern Quang Tri were struck by a coordinated series of daylight shelling. Soon afterwards, Fire Support Base (FSB) Fuller was bombarded with nearly 300 rounds of large-caliber mortar fire, and a South Vietnamese field position near Khe Sanh was hit by 500 rounds of mortar fire. As the month progressed, the number and intensity of these shellings picked up, and many were accompanied by sharp ground attacks. On 23 June, FSB Fuller was abandoned

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by the South Vietnamese and by early July it was clear that the Communists had embarked on one of their most extensive campaigns in the DMZ area since 1968.

The Current Communist Threat

1. Continued Communist reinforcement of the northern provinces of South Vietnam's Military Region 1 has raised enemy strength there to nearly 30,000 combat troops in 14 infantry and artillery regiments. The bulk of this strength is in Quang Tri Province. Furthermore, some 2,000 replacements headed for this region have been detected in the infiltration corridor, suggesting that the enemy anticipates more fighting in the near future.

2. Although there are several North Vietnamese regiments currently active in Thua Thien Province, these are situated in the mountains to the west and south and pose no immediate threat to the city of Hue. In fact, these units appear to be engaged primarily in logistical activity, although some parts of them have been harassing allied forces operating out of FSB Vaghel. [REDACTED]

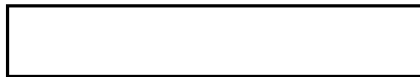
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3. The North Vietnamese also have several regiments or some 20,000 troops in southern North Vietnam where they can quickly be committed to the DMZ area. Many of these units participated in the defense of Hanoi's logistic network in eastern Laos earlier this year and are now resting and refitting. There are no indications at present that more of these are going to move south, but if Hanoi intends to sustain its summer campaign, some of them can be expected to rotate in and out of northern South Vietnam during the next few months.

4. The North Vietnamese 70th Front, the tactical authority that exercised command over enemy combat units during the allied thrust into Laos earlier this year, is now located immediately north of the DMZ. [REDACTED] the 70th Front is in charge of all enemy units now fighting in the DMZ area; this command set-up suggests that Hanoi plans to sustain a campaign in this region for

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some months yet. This headquarters is senior to the North Vietnamese B-5 Front which has long controlled the enemy forces that normally operate in the DMZ-northern Quang Tri Province area.

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5. The Communists have also added new weapons and more firepower to some of their units in the DMZ area. [redacted] of the North Vietnamese 304th Division below the central DMZ reveal that larger caliber antiaircraft weapons and perhaps an antiaircraft headquarters have been added to the division. There is also evidence that some enemy units in the DMZ area are now armed with 160mm mortars. This weapon has a range of five miles compared to the three-mile limit of the 120mm mortar -- the largest used by the Communists in South Vietnam to date. Moreover, there have been signs that some North Vietnamese elements are preparing for a "mechanized operation," suggesting that the Communists may move armored vehicles into western Quang Tri Province to support more extensive combat activity. The North Vietnamese used tanks in the Khe Sanh region in 1968 and again, more recently, against the South Vietnamese in Lam Son 719.

6. To facilitate the movement of supplies from stockpiles in North Vietnam, the Communists have since mid-May constructed the first known road through the western DMZ. This road provides a considerably shorter supply route than the one through Laos and enables the enemy to take advantage of the current dry season in the DMZ area while heavy rains and bombings are disrupting the movement of supplies to the west in Laos. Recent photography shows that additional construction is under way connecting this new road with Route 9, the main east-west road between the Laotian border and the coastal lowlands in Quang Tri. The Communists may intend to link these roads with another new road under construction that extends northward from the A Shau Valley in western Thua Thien Province.

What Lies Ahead?

7. The number of North Vietnamese forces in the area of the DMZ, the new Communist road building, and the steady departure of US combat units all suggest that Communist military activity in the northern part



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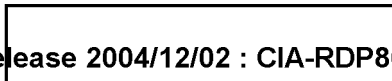
of South Vietnam will grow in scope and intensity during the next year or so. What is not so clear is how far and how hard the Communists intend to push in this region in the next few months. In some past years enemy offensive action has been carried over well into the autumn, and Hanoi may well believe the time is ripe to press farther south and east toward the populated districts of Quang Tri Province.

8. A prisoner recently claimed that his unit had been ordered to continue attacks against allied targets in Quang Tri through mid-October. On 3 July, an element of the North Vietnamese 52nd Regiment radioed plans to "ensure success of the long-term mission" and stated that "our primary mission is to stay here." A recent clandestine report alleged that the North Vietnamese intend to "occupy" all or part of Quang Tri Province during this summer's campaign. Although this account of enemy intentions almost certainly is overdrawn, it suggests -- like most of the other evidence -- that the fighting in the DMZ area is likely to continue through the summer.

9. South Vietnamese military forces arrayed against the Communists in Quang Tri are among the best in the country. They apparently have recovered from the losses they suffered during the Lam Son 719 operation into Laos and have been performing satisfactorily in recent weeks. South Vietnamese commanders claim that morale is good among the rank-and-file and that they are quite capable of containing the current Communist threat as long as the US provides substantial air and logistics support. With the aid of reinforcements from other parts of the country, these South Vietnamese leaders seem determined to thwart any enemy thrust eastward toward population centers.

10. Nonetheless, the South Vietnamese clearly have their work cut out for them in Quang Tri. As more and more US forces leave the northern provinces, they are increasingly on their own and forced to make some difficult decisions. It is not yet clear whether they intend to meet the North Vietnamese head on by taking a stand at forward strongpoints along the DMZ and in the western mountains, as the US forces did in earlier years, or whether they will adopt a more

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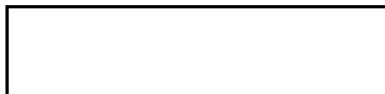


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cautious strategy emphasizing defense of positions closer to the population centers along the coast. Much will depend, of course, on how hard the enemy pushes and how well territorial forces can pick up the local security burden and leave ARVN units free to pursue the North Vietnamese.

11. The results of the North Vietnamese effort in Quang Tri during the coming weeks and the performance of the South Vietnamese against this drive may provide some important clues to the prospects for Vietnamization during the next year or so. The Communists clearly have enough troops now in place or nearby to put the South Vietnamese to a severe test. If Hanoi chooses to limit its commitment this summer, the immediate test is likely to be quite inconclusive. But whether the drive comes this year or next, the North Vietnamese clearly seem to be setting the stage for heavier action in the northern part of South Vietnam. Indeed, they may now be preparing to try what they have not tried since the beginning of the Vietnamization program in mid-1969 -- to attempt to demonstrate convincingly that the South Vietnamese will not be able to keep Communist forces in check after US combat units have left South Vietnam.



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